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# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

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Report 2003-5

OFFICE OF CITY AUDITOR – SEATTLE

February 18, 2003

A copy of the Office of City Auditor's full report regarding citizen complaint resolution processes can be obtained at the Auditor's website at <http://seattle.gov/audit> or by calling (206) 233-3801. Please direct any questions or comments regarding this report, or suggestions for future audits to Susan Cohen, Seattle City Auditor, at (206) 233-3801.

## IMPROVING THE CITY'S CITIZEN COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCESS

### AUDIT OBJECTIVES

The City has established both centralized and department-level response processes to resolve citizen complaints. The Citizens Service Bureau serves as the centralized complaint resource to assist citizens in working with City officials and departments to resolve issues.

This review of the City complaint resolution practices focuses on whether the City responds to citizen complaints effectively, and identifies potential improvements to the complaint-handling process.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

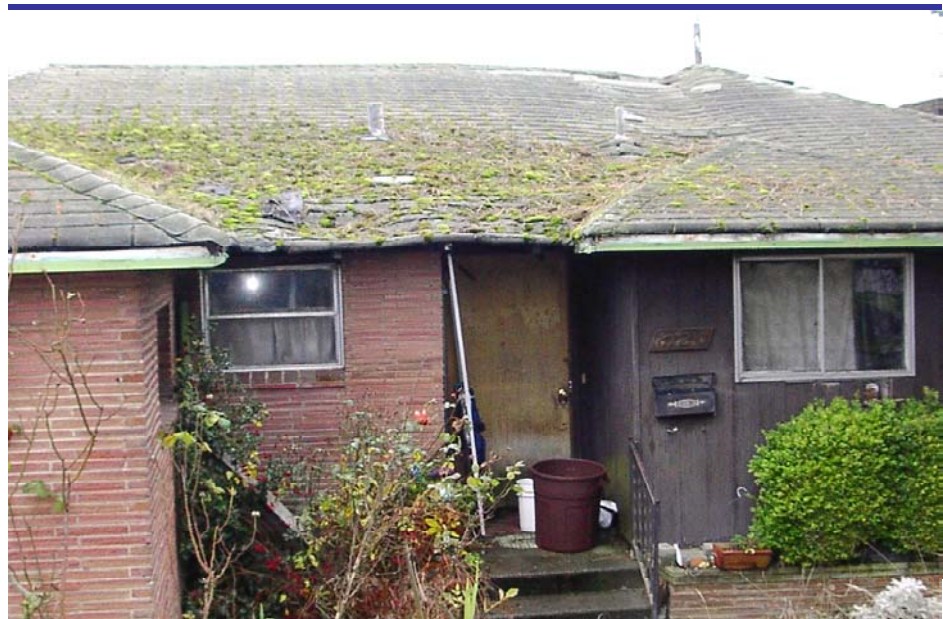
City departments should consider increasing the timeliness of communications with citizens and providing routine status updates on efforts to resolve issues.

City departments should also consider cost-effective methods to inform citizens about key contact points for reporting complaints, and the roles, responsibilities and authority of City personnel involved in the resolution of complaint issues.

### SEATTLE CITIZENS GENERALLY SATISFIED

Our citizen satisfaction survey found that Seattle citizens were generally satisfied with the effectiveness and timeliness of the Citizens Service Bureau's complaint-handling practices. However, survey respondents offered several suggestions for improving other City agencies' complaint processes, such as improved frequency and timeliness of communications. The Citizens Service Bureau's survey ratings also compared favorably with those received by four other jurisdictions.

Our in-depth examination of six complex and recurring complaints showed that the City and community stakeholders have developed innovative and cooperative approaches to resolve issues. Citizen confidence in the City's complaint processes could also be improved with more extensive and dedicated investigative resources, comparable to an ombudsman function.



Citizen complaints regarding hoarder houses require a collaborative, multi-agency approach to achieve resolution. An effective resolution requires balancing the public interest with individual property rights.

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